Relationship Proneness – the Concept, Its Dimensions and Indicators.

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This paper is about consumers’ relationship proneness, i.e. their conscious tendency to engage in relationships, and it purports to assess if the aspects that are relevant to interpersonal relations can be applied to commercial relationships as well. An exploratory factor analysis points to the existence of three facets of relationship proneness, in line with previous research: they relate to social benefits deriving, first of all, from the personal contact with the supplier; second, from special treatment; third, from search for assistance and guidance. It is also suggested that relationship proneness may be related to general personality traits (Big Five).

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WORKING PAPERS

Endowment Effect as Inertia Equity in Brand Switching

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Abstract

Little research has investigated the behavioral aspect of brand inertia in brand switching based on behavioral decision theory. The present research employs endowment effect to conceptualize the inertia element of brand switching (e.g., from brand A to B). Past research normally separately assesses consumers’ willingness to accept (WTA) to give up brand A and the willingness to pay (WTP) to acquire brand B. The effect postulates that the WTA is normally larger than the WTP. The present research proposes a joint assessment of the endowment effect in brand switching. It uses the price reduction (i.e., inertia equity) that just overcomes brand inertia to measure the difference between WTA and WTP. Empirical evidence demonstrates and strengthens the conceptualization of endowment effect as inertia equity in brand switching.

References


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Introduction

In the last decades, research has highlighted the existence of a wide spectrum of approaches to buyer-seller exchanges, ranging from transactional to relational (for instance, Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987). In search for explanations of such a wide spectrum, reference is sometimes made to the individual attributes of both buyers and sellers, pointing towards their inclinations to engage into or to shy away from relationships. As far as buyers are concerned, researchers have evoked the existence of “relational”, “long-term oriented” or “transactional”, “short-term oriented” customers (Garbarino and Johnson 1999)–meaning that some of the customers are eager to engage in stable relationships and interactions with their suppliers, while others are more prone to establish arm’s length transactions.

Nevertheless, very little research has been devoted to the analysis of this orientation, and of its antecedents and consequences, if it isn’t for some pioneering efforts and a few noteworthy exceptions (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schroeder and Iacobucci 2001; Odekerken-Schroder, De Wulf and Schumacher 2003).

Such an orientation is meant to be a stable trait of individuals and has been termed “relationship proneness”, defined as a conscious tendency to engage in relationships.

“Relationship proneness” has been associated with an interest for stable exchanges, and has been measured in terms of willingness “to be a regular customer” and “a steady customer”, and for “going the extra mile” to buy at the same shop (De Wulf et al., 2001). But, occasionally, a different approach has creeped into and different items have been used, without much discussion, related to the existence of personal contact and special treatment (“looking for personal contact with the personnel” and “making efforts in order to be treated in a special way”) (as in De Wulf and Odekerken-Schroder 2000). This is an important undertaking, since relations are multidimensional, and it is therefore very important to work out their different facets and to better understand how those facets relate to each other.

Researchers have also dealt with a whole host of constructs related to the antecedents and consequences of relationships. On the one hand, in keeping with evidence from social psychology, showing that relationships are influenced by stable traits of personality of the partners involved (Robins, Caspi and Moffitt 2000), they are suggesting that also buyers-sellers relationships are influenced by those traits (Aaker, Fournier and Brasel 2004). On the other hand, they have addressed the complex web of links between the propensity to engage in relations (relationship proneness) and behavioral intentions or relationship outcomes (De Wulf and Odekerken-Schroder 2000; De Wulf, Odekerken-Schroder and Iacobucci 2001; Odekerken-Schroder, De Wulf and Schumacher 2003).

Research objectives

Our research objectives are threefold.

First of all, we want to analyze the 3+2 items that have been associated originally to relationship proneness (De Wulf et al., 2000; 2001), and that have been referred to above, to uncover their links.
Secondly, we want to explore the many aspects of relations, that add to the ones which have already been focused upon and that have been associated to interpersonal relations in the literature in socio-psychology (Fiske, 2000). Finally, we relate relationship proneness to personality traits, and in particular to basic traits (Big Five) and narrower dimensions (sociability and approval motivation).

Methodology

We develop a scale of relationship proneness, trying to capture the many-sided facets of relations; we end up with a compact and parsimonious 14-items scale, referring to the relationship to hairdressers. We measured the Big Five with a short version of the Big Five Questionnaire (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni & Perugini, 1993). Sociability is measured as in Cheek and Buss (1981); approval motivation as in Martin (1984). We run the traditional correlation and factor analysis. The sample is a convenience sample of 220 subjects, with diverse socio-demographic characteristics.

Results

When the 3+2 original items are pooled together and factor analyzed, 2 factors emerge, accounting for 68% of variance, with the 3 initial items loading on the first factor and the other 2 on the second.

When factor analyzing our 14-items scale, 3 factors emerge—social/interpersonal dimension, preferential treatment and reassurance, explaining 51% of variance. Correlations among factors ranged from .26 (social/interpersonal and preferential treatment) to .46 (social/interpersonal and reassurance).

When the 3+2 original items are pooled together with our 14 items, 4 different factors emerge, with the 3 items loading on a factor by themselves, and the other 2 splitting on 2 different factors (social/interpersonal and preferential treatment).

The social/interpersonal dimension was significantly correlated with traits of extraversion (r=.21), friendliness (r=.18) and sociability (r=.30). Preferential treatment and reassurance were respectively correlated with extraversion (r=.20) and approval motivation (r=.34). Relationship proneness and social/interpersonal dimension were significantly correlated (r=.30). These two dimensions showed the only relevant associations with satisfaction, respectively r=.27 for social/interpersonal and r=.35 for relationship proneness. An alpha level of .01 was used in all significance test.

Managerial implications:

We suggest that managers need to analyze the multi-dimensional nature of buyer-supplier relationships and to identify their different facets, and the relations among them.

We have established clearly that the orientation towards repeated and stable relationships is different, and can be treated differently, from the willingness to establish personalized relations; but also that they are related to a certain extent. This same orientation is not linked to the willingness to receive a special treatment and reassurance from one’s own supplier.

We have also established that there is a significant relation between personality traits and orientation towards relations, implying that buyers will establish the same kind of relation across categories and across suppliers.

Limitations and extension for further research:

Although it has been widely used in research, we are aware that results may not be directly generalizable, because of the idiosyncratic nature of the service setting. Therefore a wider research approach is required, in order to feature in differences across categories (in the service sector and otherwise) and different approaches towards categories by consumers.

References


